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ABSTRACT

A study (involving 100 children in grades 1-5) investigated whether children thought of reading as especially a male or female activity. Findings indicated that in grades 1-4, boys regarded reading as mostly a feminine activity, while in grade 5 boys regarded reading as mostly a masculine activity and girls regarded it as mostly a feminine activity. (Three tables of data are included, 19 references are attached, and appendixes contain the survey instrument and a table of attitudes toward reading.) (SR)

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SEX DIFFERENCES AND READING GENDER

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BY

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ABSTRACT

This study involved 100 students from grades one thru five. Ten boys and ten girls from each grade were randomly selected from a class. It was hypothesized that boys and girls in grades one thru five feel reading is not especially a female or male activity.

An analysis of the results indicated that in grades one thru four, boys regard reading as mostly a feminine activity. However, in grade five boy's regard reading as mostly a male activity and girls regard it as mostly a feminine activity.

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I would also like to say thanks to my husband, Michael.

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It is a well known fact that boys and girls are different in many ways. It is also true that social attitudes towards reading are very important in becoming literate. If, for example, boys consider reading to be a female activity, they might not allocate sufficient time for it. As a result their reading ability would not be up to its highest potential level. This would suggest that modifications in our attitudes towards reading should be made. A program developing sex-appropriateness in reading attitudes could be implemented by the classroom teacher, the reading specialist, as well as parents.

Much research has been done on the topic of sex differences in attitudes towards reading. The research

reveals that different samples view the reading activity as sex-appropriate for males, females, or both female and male.

Fairly recent research that states reading is a male activity was done by Richard B. May and Lloyd Ollila (1981). Their study revealed that preschoolers associated books and other reading materials as more appropriate for boys. The materials used to measure these results were similiar to those used by Downing (1979).

A study that shows reading is considered a female and male activity was done by Steiner, Evelyn E., Steinen, and Newman (April, 1981). They conducted research using the Downing Object-Activity Opinion Survey and the Estes Reading Attitude Scale. Their

results revealed that boys in grades one thru four felt reading was sex-appropriate for both females and males.

Most of the research in this field states that children view reading as a feminine activity. Mazurkiewicz's study (1960) of social-cultural influences and reading attitudes of children show a positive relationship between fathers and sons attitudes toward reading. Boys as well as their fathers felt reading was a feminine activity. Labercane's and Shapiro's study (1986) states that there is a gender difference in attitudes towards reading and a neurological influence on reading. Sheridan's and Fizdale's study (1981) states that is a stereotype belief in reading attitudes. Children, early in their school career identify reading as a female activity.

They state that, "Ridding ourselves of the excess cultural baggage which unnecessarily effects children's achievement in reading and mathematics will enable us to help children achieve their potential not restricted by some prior notion of sex stereotypes unrelated to today's world." (1981, pg. 10)

To reach the status of a mature reader, one must practice the art of reading. If children are not reading because they think reading is not sex-appropriate for them, it is our duty to change their attitudes.

HYPOTHESIS

What is the status of the attitudes of our children today? Do we need to change the attitudes? To add information on the topic the following study was undertaken. It was hypothesized that boys and girls in grades one thru five feel reading is not especially a female or male acvtivity.

DEFINITIONS

Sex-appropriate - Sex Appropriate is that which is regarded by the learner as proper and correct for the members of his or her sex.

Sex-typed Perception of Reading - This is a conception of reading based upon and affected by an individual's sex-role standards where reading is regarded as appropriate for members of one sex and inappropiate for members of the other sex.

ASSUMPTIONS

All children are honest.

LIMITATIONS

This survey research is only from one school.

PROCEDURES

Permission from the principal and district was obtained for twenty students on each grade level to be randomly selected to participate in the study. The students reading levels in grades one and two were below the readability level of the survey,

utilized by Mazuriewicz (1960). Therefore, the survey was individually read to each child. In grades three through five, the survey was read to as a group. Upon completion of the survey an analysis of the students answers to prove or disprove my hypothesis was undertaken.

RESULTS

Table I indicates the percentage of girls who

TABLE I

Gender Attitudes Of Girls Towards Reading

grade	1	2	3	4	5
% of girls who think reading is mostly a boys activity	10	25	10	0	0
% of girls who think reading is mostly a girls activity	90	75	90	100	100

think reading is mostly for girls or boys. The majority of girls in grades one thru three feel reading is mostly a girl's activity. In grades four and five, all the girls feel reading is mostly a girl's activity.

Table II show that in grades one thru three

TABLE II

Gender Attitudes Of Boys Towards Reading

grade	1	2	3	4	5
% of boys who think reading is mostly a boys activity	40	33	40	10	70
% of boys who think reading is mostly a	60	67	60	90	30

over sixty percent of the boys feel reading is mostly a girl's activity. It should be noted that the fourth grade teacher in this class was a male.

The boys in grade five, paint a different picture of boys' attitudes towards reading from that found in grades one thru four. Seventy percent of the boys feel reading is mostly a boy's activity.

Table III indicates the chi-square results.

Table III

grade	1	2	3	4	5
x^2	2.4	.012	2.4	1.05	10.77

The chi-square shows a significance in grade 5.

CONCLUSIONS

This research was executed to determine childrens attitudes towards reading and to compare current findings with previous years findings. The parameters of this theses are based upon a very small sampling of population in a title one school.

The majority of the students are of low income families with diverse ethnic backgrounds and their native language is not English (mostly hispanic and oriental). Therefore, the conclusion of this research cannot be extended beyond the sample population. This study indicated a few findings relative to boys and girls attitudes towards reading.

The majority of girls and boys consider reading mostly a girl's activity. This supports the findings of most of the previous research.

The results of grade five for boys, however, reveals that the boys consider reading to be mostly a boys activity. The results are supported by very few studies. To determine whether the teacher was of significance, the teacher of this fifth grade class was interviewed to ask her what she did in the classroom that might encourage the boys to

consider reading to be mostly a boy's activity. However, she is a new teacher and could not give any explanation for the results. It would be interesting to see how her future students would answer this survey.

In the final findings, the research done with grades one through four supports the previous research stating that boys and girls consider reading mostly a feminine activity. An interesting observtion to note, is the results of the fourth grade. Ninety percent of the boys in this class feel reading is mostly a girls activity. The researcher chose this particuliar class because it had a male teacher. This supports Lahaderne (1976) findings. These results suggest that a male role model in the classroom at this late stage of development does not encourage boys to feel reading is sex-appropiate for boys.

It would appear that society needs to encourage boys to consider reading as an activity meant for everyone and not just for a specific sex. If we judge solely by these results from grade five, we may be on our way to making changes in attitude. Further research to determine whether this finding can be replicated is recommended. Research to determine whether boys are not allocating sufficient time to reading because they think reading is mostly a feminine activity is also suggested.

Sex Differences And Reading Gender:

Related Literature

There have been quite a few articles related to sex differences and reading attitudes. It is important to understand previous related research before we go on to new research. This paper contains research which reports different attitudes that people have towards reading. Research states that people may view reading as either a male, female, or both female and male activity.

There have been different methods of testing that evaluate peoples' attitudes regarding reading. Some of these methods or scales were devised by: Paul S. Redelheim (1976), Thomas H. Estes, and John Downing (1979).

R. May and L. Ollila (1981) used 136 children from day-care centers and kindergartens for their study. Fifty percent of the children were boys. All of the children were given test booklets and a structured interview containing items related to reading. This study revealed that preschoolers, boys as well as girls, associated books and other reading materials as more appropriate for boys.

Steiner, Steinen, and Newman (1981) cited that reading is not sex-typed as feminine or masculine activity. The study was conducted with students in grades one thru four, from two parochial schools. They stated that given a different population of students their findings might have been different. The biggest implication derived from their study may be that there is a trend away from sex-differences in reading attitudes.

Gross (1978) cited no differences in reading attitudes on an Israeli kibbutz. Reading was not sex-typed as either a feminine or masculine activity. He chose the kibbutz due to their communal living and their socialization system in which both sexes are expected to equally work together.

Parker and Paradis (1986) in their study had this question to answer when they were executing their research; "Do attitudes differ between boys and girls in primary grades or boys and girls in the intermediate grades?" From a population in the Rocky Mountain region, a random sammpling of 10 subjects from 24 classes were chosen. The Heathington Primary and Heathington Intermediate scales were used to find that throughout grades 1-6 the attitudes of the children were that reading is more sex-appropriate for girls than for boys.

Mazurkiewcz (1960) states that there is a socio-cultural influence in peoples attitudes towards reading. Using a M-F Inventory, he found that children show a positive relationship between father's and son's attitudes in regard to reading. Boys as well as their fathers feel reading is a feminine activity.

Johnson's (1976) study supports the idea of the socio-cultural reasons for reading attitudes. Johnson studied for non-English speaking countries: United States, Canada, Nigeria, and England. In England and Nigeria boys felt reading was for boys. In the United States and Canada boys felt reading was for girls. In comparison of the cultures of these countries, Johnson states that the differences in reading could be attributed to cultural influences.

E. Sheridan's and B. Fizdales's (1981) study states there is a sterotype belief in reading attitudes. Children, early in their school career identify reading as a female activity. They state, "Ridding ourselves of the excess cultural baggage which unnecessarily effects children's achievement in reading and mathematics will enable us to help children achieve their potential not restricted by some prior notion of sex stereotypes unrelated to today's world." (pp. 10)

Fran Lehr (1982) in this research of literature of reading attitudes, states that there is a socio-cultural influences on peoples beliefs. Lehr also cites, that the role of parents is very important. "If they perceive reading as being important, then their children-sons as well as daughters-will probably do so, too." (pp. 746)

Beverely Swanson (1982) did her study to find the reading attitudes of first graders' and to determine the attitudes after four months of reading instruction. Three-hundred and seventy non-repeating first grade students in an urban Northeast Georgian County were used in this study. Ten males and females were randomly selected. The findings implied: First graders have differentiated attitudes towards reading. However, there were slight differences. The social class of the child affects the reading attitude scores. There was more of a differential at the lower end of the social scale.

Anderson's, Tollefson's, and Gilbert's (1985) investigated the attitudes towards reading of 276 gifted students. The grades range from 1-12. Using the Likert scale which measures the students attitudes, they reported: females had a more positive attitude towards reading than males. They

also cited that primary students had a more positive attitude than high school students.

Jon Shapiro(1986) wrote a paper which revealed there is a socio-cultural as well as a neuropsychological influence on attitudes towards reading. His information came from an examination of various pieces of literature.

John Helfeldt (1983) claims that not enough research has been done on the neurological influences towards reading attitudes. He states that it is important to consider differentiated brain-functioning with socio-cultural influences. Through laboratory experiment it has been found that there is a biological influence. Infant females have enhanced auditory perception, while infant boys are more visual and they learn better through manipulation of materials. Helfeldt says that an instructional implication from his study could be changing the way teachers teach. For example, for a boy we might approach reading with an emphasize on the perceptual process of vision.

Lahaderne (1976) is a research and evaluation specialist in California. He investigated feminized schools. Even though male and female teachers do give different messages to students for boys and girls, boys do not experience greater success and personal adjustment with male teachers.

Courtney and Schell (1976) hypothesized that boys, with absent father, might benefit from a male instuctor. The results revealed that male teachers had no significant effect upon reading. Since this study was executed with sixth graders, the possibility exists that different results may occur if male teachers are introduced at the earlier grades.

Jon Shapiro (1980) used 141 second grade boys and girls. This study revealed significant differences in attitudes by students according to teacher gender. Shapiro feels that the primary grade male student who were initially exposed to a male teacher had a better attitude towards reading than those who were not.

Dolores Grayson (1985) presented a paper on a study involving gender expectations that teachers have towards boys and girls in the classroom. Over a period of eight years, teachers attended workshops to help them to rid themselves of stereotyped expections. In conclusion, Grayson found: Teachers who participated the program reported an increase of non-stereotypical interactions, materials and activities. Boys and girls in classes taught by teachers participation in the program achieved gains in reading and math.

Based on an analysis of all these related research studies, it can be concluded that if boys do think reading is a female activity, it could be for these following reasons: 1) socio-cultural influences, and 2) neurological influences. Within socio-cultural influences there are influences. Such as: 1) parent influence, 2) teacher influence, and 3) society as a whole. To modify our thinking one must take into consideration all these views and then impliment a program to help change reading attitudes. Times are changing and, I hope, so are attitudes.

Not all the research stated that boys and girls feel reading is a feminine activity. This may suggest that peoples attitudes towards reading are changing.

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APPENDICES

A. SURVEY

Write a: B for Boys
G for Girl

Boy or girl_____

Age_____ grade____

__ Sewing
__ Mountain Climbing
__ Hiking
__ Swimming
__ Cooking
__ Baseball
__ Whittling
__ Football
__ Reading
__ Wood Working
__ Carving
__ Painting
__ Singing
__ Dancing
__ Diving
__ Writing
__ Model Boats
__ Playing With Dolls
__ Model Railroads

__ Playing Nurse
__ Tennis
__ Golf
__ Checkers
__ Chess
__ Playing House
__ Housecleaning
__ Studying
__ Jumping Rope
__ Conscious About Looks
__ Soccer
__ Hockey
__ Climbing Trees
__ Gymnastics
__ Body Building
__ Playing Poker
__ Playing Pool
__ Bowling
__ Sculpturing

B. Table of Attitudes Towards Reading

Raw Score Of The Students Attitudes Towards Reading In Grades One Thru Five

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
# of boys who feel reading is mostly a boys activity	4	3	4	1	7
# of boys who feel reading is mostly a girls activity	6	8	6	9	3
# of girls who feel reading is mostly a boys activity	1	2	1	0	0
# of girls who feel reading is mostly a girls activity	9	6	9	10	10
# of students who could not choose	0	1	0	0	0